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Reflections on Human Rights and the New US World Disorder¹

Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt²

“You are for us or against us”

George Bush Jr.

Introduction

In the present stage of capitalism there is a tendency that human rights in most cases are used with double-standards by the major powers in the international system, especially by the United States in its so-called war on terror. It is of immense importance to explore and comprehend this new and significant development in the discourse of human rights which makes it difficult to adopt a critical position. The debate stemming from East Asia on the universality versus particularistic use of human rights has almost disappeared. Exceptionalism no matter its name or excuse, be it security, foreign policy, so-called humanitarian intervention, religious fanaticism, gender or the dogmatic status of free markets and trade will always be in contradiction to the universal definition of human rights. Likewise there is a tendency to forget that there are two aspects of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, which focus both on political and socio-economic rights. In a world experiencing a war and an existing order based on barbarism, intolerance and neo-colonialism it is of great importance to establish alternatives and take active responsibility or risk becoming either passively or directly involved in supporting today's prevailing insecure and inhumane order. In conclusion and seen in a historical perspective, issues like human rights and promotion of world peace cannot be divorced from international power relations and the growing problems of uneven and unequal development. In fact, the poverty/wealth dichotomy is the prime source of world instability. In other words as long as the North-South gap continues to grow the prospects for increasing peace and human rights are bleak indeed and as long as the West is fighting the so-called terrorist threat with military means it isn't just losing the fight against terrorism - it is fuelling it across the globe. It should be emphasized

¹This is a slightly revised paper based on a keynote presentation at an International Symposium on Human Rights held 5th January 2003 at Bombay Bazar, Meerut Cantt. India. The Symposium was organized by the World Peace Movement Trust. The author kindly express gratitude to the organizers and especially Secretary General Ravindra Kumar, Lt. General J.N. Singh, Justice R.S. Shukla, Trustee Nand Gopal Singhal and not least Former Governor and MP B. Satnarayan Reddy for helpful comments and suggestions.

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that disorder and terrorism have social roots being intrinsically linked to inequality and unevenness. Furthermore it appears to be non-state organized thus indicating that traditional remedies and thinking is unable to solve the problem.

The Post-Cold War peace dividend

Debates about human rights have usually centered on the political and legal sphere and been directed toward the jurisdiction of the state. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights - so says the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but there has been a tendency to ignore the fact that economic, social and cultural rights are violated on a massive scale - a situation which has exploded in magnitude after the end of the Cold War and during the so-called Golden Years of Globalization.

In fact, what we have observed is the globalization of poverty - a conceptual device constructed by multilateral and neoliberal donors and ideologists to deflect public awareness away from inequality and uneven development whereby people's economic and social rights are violated through the denial of economic welfare and security. In an ideal world, human rights would be defined as the end and means of development, but in the real world, policies aimed at reduction of inequalities and uneven development have not received much priority. This also expresses itself in the fact that the United States and the European Union are sanctioning a link between political human rights violations and development aid and imposing economic sanctions in a selective and highly hypocritical manner.

The end of the Cold War predicted the spread of peace, tolerance and improved welfare for all. Commentators talked about the peace dividend while some scholars referred to the final victory of pluralist markets and democracies. The reverse seems to happen: corporate concentration and globalization, and the aggressive projection of the now uncontained military power of the United States, have helped erode democratic substance and increase inequality, conflict, ethnic cleansing and open warfare on a global scale.³

The New World Order

Speaking to a joint session of Congress in 1990, during the build-up for the first Gulf war, President Bush Sen. mentioned that the overarching objective of the war was: "A new world order... a new era - freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace, an era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony ... Today, that new world order is struggling to be born, a

³Edward S. Herman, Parallel And Linked Genocides: Iraq And Palestine, Swans, January 20, 2003, <http://www.swans.com>.

world quite different from the one we have known, a world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle, a world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice, a world where the strong respect the rights of the weak”.⁴

The basic contours of the actual New World Order were coming into focus 20 years ago, with the emergence of a “tripolar world” as economic power diffused within the US domains. The collapse of the Soviet-type socialism added several new dimensions. First there are now prospects for the Latin Americanization of much of the former Soviet empire, that is, for its return to its traditional quasi-colonial status of providing resources, cheap labour, markets, investment opportunities, and offering other standard Third World amenities like a dismal human rights record as seen in Chechnya.

A second consequence of the Soviet collapse is that the US now can use unilateral force without any external interference. This became evident during the Iraq invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent US-led first Gulf war. What was entirely new in this context was explained by Lawrence Eagleburger in his statement: that the emerging New World Order should be based on a kind of new intervention in the practice of diplomacy: Others will pay the costs of US intervention to keep order. This changed, as will be shown later in this paper with the advent of the second Gulf war.

According to George Bush Sen. the New World Order was a challenge to keep the dangers of disorder at bay. In a 28 February 1990 speech at a fundraising event in San Francisco, he said: “Time and again in this century, the political map of the world was transformed. And in each instance, a New World Order came about through the advent of a new tyrant or the outbreak of a bloody global war, or its end”.⁵

And how was this all to be done? It involved a new defined role and function for the United Nations as in the first Gulf war, to sanction the efforts of members to deter, and if necessary resist, aggression. In short Bush spoke about a New World Order based on respect for international law and made secure by an effective United Nations.

Today, the White House has abandoned the phrase “The New World Order”. The transition from New World Order to New World Disorder has been completed in a remarkable short time.

⁴ 'Toward a New World Order'- A transcript of former President George Herbert Walker Bush's address to a joint session of Congress and the nation From the National Archives, September 11, 1990

⁵Quelle: Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States of America., Bush Library

The real content of George Bush Jr.'s response to terror is breaking international law and is being implemented by the sole superpower and by its Israeli client that claim to be the repository of a higher morality and the world's human rights champion.

The numbers killed in Iraq before the U.S. invasion in April 2003 have already been impressive: Estimates run from 1-1.5 million, about half of which are said to have been small children. Back in 1996, secretary of state Madeleine Albright conceded on national TV that 500,000 children might have died as a result of sanctions, but she said this cost was "worth it". The sanctions caused the death of more Iraqis than had been killed by "all the weapons of mass destruction in human history". Needless to say, the numbers killed because of the sanctions tower above the totals in Bosnia, which were greeted with horror in the West as a clear case of genocide.⁶

The unilateral action of Washington has pressed for the application of what Edward Herman calls the "sanctions of mass destruction" that have decimated the Iraq population, and it has waged a war of aggression that has added to an already immense death toll. In the same context, Israel has been engaged in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians for half a century, with crucial U.S. economic and military aid and diplomatic protection. But Israel has stepped up its cleansing pace. The patron-client relationship is straight forward under the protection of George Bush Jr. and the "war on terror". The United States uses Israel as its proxy to help it maintain domination in the Middle East and for other services, while Israel uses the United States to help it pursue policy of a "redeeming the land" from non-Jewish inhabitants in the occupied territories.⁷

The majority among UN members has for decades voted against Israel's policies. General Assembly votes on action to restrain Israel and to force it to adhere to Security Council rulings usually run about 150 or 160 to two or three. Israel has also in several decades violated the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from confiscating land and abusing its populace. With unconditional US support, Israel has been able to continue this policy of sidestepping international law-without any significant consequences.

Human rights of the Market

The new millennium has been marked by fear and terror. Whether it is so-called rogue states or Al Qaeda or the rightwing militant religious fundamentalists in the United States there is no doubt that the belief in the Market has become the

⁶Edward S. Herman, *Parallel And Linked Genocides: Iraq And Palestine*, Swans, January 20, 2003, <http://www.swans.com>

⁷Ibid

new dogma and thus must be included in any analysis of why human rights is something all government leaders agree upon, but seldom implement.

Historically decolonization, and the development decade were thought to have improved wealth, welfare and increased democratic participation in the Third World. Following the end of the Cold War, the peace dividend eroded into ethnic religious nationalism and communalism. The Fourth World indigenous people's rights were been marginalized and we saw a Thirdworldization of the North and the rise of racism and neofacism. At the same time a new type of global slavery/bonded labor/global prostitution - and trafficking has emerged and because of relentless neoliberal globalization, human insecurity related to the erosion of traditional societal institutions, famine and disease have been the results in many parts of the developing countries. There has been a real increase in the North-South gap and the Cold War political and social human rights dividend has disappeared from the agenda despite the UN Human Rights Commission and the rise of Global Governance. The Bush Administration's war on terror has fuelled new fears and the erosion of human dignity and an emerging world economic crisis.

One of the major causes of this planetary panic can be identified as the Market. The real menace comes from this faceless all-powerful all-present terrorist force acting as god, and just like a god, the Market thinks it's eternal. Its many disciples cry, "the Market is nervous" and warn, "don't upset the Market" The criminal record of this Market strikes fear into the hearts of many. It has spent its entire life-cycle robbing food, destroying jobs, holding countries hostage and starting wars.⁸ As Galeano notes, "the majority of the people on this earth don't know whether there is food or a job - they have to fight daily for land against environmental degradation and hunger and children die of hunger every minute. In the terrorist organization of the world, protected by military power, a thousand million people suffer from chronic hunger and six hundred million people are overweight. Strong economy, low standard of living: Ecuador and El Salvador have adopted the dollar as their national currency, but their populations are fleeing. Never has so much poverty and emigration been seen in these countries. The sale of human meat abroad creates disturbance, sadness and divides. In 2001, the people of Ecuador obliged to seek work elsewhere sent more money back home than the amount of exports in bananas, shrimp, tuna, coffee and cacao".⁹

What makes this a particular moment in history particularly volatile is seemingly how the crisis is becoming permanent. First there is a crisis of

⁸Eduardo Galeano, The USA is at war, Times of fear, Z Net, January 14, 2003, <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=15&ItemID=2868>

⁹Ibid.

overcapacity which is connected with a new crisis of how to maintain ideological hegemony and the importance of continuing the rhetorical liberalism that sustain the productive system and at the same time sustaining a real politics of protectionism and classical mercantilism.¹⁰

As Walden Bello notes, tied to an increasingly integrated global production system and market, the manufacturing sector of the United States, saw the growth of its profits stop after 1997. In the following years, almost all key industrial sectors were suffering overcapacity globally, with the worst situation existing in the telecommunications sector, where only 2.5 per cent of the infrastructure was being utilized. By 2002, the gap between capacity and output globally was the largest since the Great Depression.

With manufacturing and the rest of the “real economy” ceasing to absorb investment profitably, capital migrated to the speculative sector, where a period of hyperactive growth in high-technology stocks was carefully nursed by the low-interest-rate policy and “New Economy” discourses. Grounded in the illusion of future profitability of high-tech firms, the dot.com phenomenon extended the upswing by about two years. But with the profitability of the financial sector dependent on the underlying, actual profitability of the manufacturing sector, this finance-driven growth ultimately ran out of steam. The loss of \$7 trillion in paper wealth in the stock-market collapse that began in March 2000 represented the rude reassertion of the reality of a global economy crippled by overcapacity, overproduction and lack of profitability. With the mechanism of “stock-market Keynesianism” exhausted, the capacity of the U.S. economy to avoid a serious and prolonged downturn has been greatly eroded - a condition increasingly recognized by mainstream economists who talk about “a double-dip recession” for the United States. One of the purposes of the US neocolonial invasion of Iraq is temporarily to draw the attention away from this deepening economic crisis that is shaping up to be the worst crisis of global capitalism since the Great Depression 70 years ago.¹¹ The references to weapons of mass destruction and links to terrorism were clearly twofold - to destroy any serious force against the extreme right-wing regime in Israel and an attempt to avoid public focus on the crisis of the US and the global economy.

The real causes of terror are rooted in the social sphere and the relentless power given to the market forces in the past decades. What is needed for a New World Order is what John Kenneth Gailbraith speaks of when he identifies poverty as the prime source of world disorder requiring a continued and enlarged flow of resources from the rich countries to the poor. He also speaks of the need to

¹⁰Walden Bello, The Multiple Crises of Global Capitalism, Canadian Dimension, January/February 2003

¹¹Ibid

expand educational opportunities in the Third World, remembering that there is no literate population that is poor and no illiterate population that is anything but poor. I tend to agree with this modest aim as one of the prerequisites of order either at the national or the international level.¹²

The world is divided into a minority zone of peace, security and prosperity and a vast majority zone of conflict, misery and impoverishment. This makes it imperative to understand the impact of globalization on a much wider scale and why social insecurity, disharmony, fear and dismal human rights are increasing all over the world.¹³

“Globalization” is a fashion-word - an ideological construct - in line with phrases such as “Clash of Civilizations”, “The End of History” and the like. It is based on a reinterpretation of Imperialism and denotes new forms of capital export/accumulation and neo-liberal hegemony/the Washington consensus which have become embedded in the Bretton Woods Institutions (Privatization, Deregulation and Free Trade) and linked with the compression of time and space and the positivist claim that increases in information technology, transportation and new R & D inventions ultimately will lead to peace, harmony and improved living conditions on a global scale.

However, this ideological construct is based on a specific logic of power and structural dominance - the impacts and results are obvious to those who take into consideration that: The world's richest 50m people earn as much as the poorest 2.7 bn and may soon be forced to live in heavily protected gated communities to escape the resentment of the billions living below the poverty line. There has been a staggering increase in global inequality, which has been rising as rapidly internationally as in Britain under Mrs. Thatcher. One recent study covering 85 per cent of the world's population from 91 countries has found that the richest one % of the world has income equivalent to the poorest 57 per cent; four fifths of the world's population live below what in North America and Europe is considered the poverty line. The poorest ten per cent of Americans are still better off than two-thirds of the world population.¹⁴

¹²Cf Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt: Rethinking the Nexus between Development Theory and IR: From Old Divisions to New Encounters, DIR Development Research Series, Working Paper Series No. 107, Aalborg University, Denmark - <http://www.ihis.aau.dk>.

¹³The following is adapted from a presentation by Jacques Hersh and Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt at the International Workshop on Globalization, New Technologies, Inequalities and Social Well-being Development, Aalborg University, Denmark, April 4-6 2002, Co-organized by European Association for Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) and DIR.

¹⁴For this and parts of the following discussion, see Robert Hunter Wade, Is Globalization Making World Income Distribution More Equal, LSE Working Paper 01.01, 2001 - <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/destin/workpapers/wadeincome.pdf>

We can wonder how long such huge inequalities can persist in the face of ever-closer contacts, not least through internet, television and movies, where opulent lifestyles of the rich influence expectations and often breed resentment among the poor.

Should it be of concern to the rich? Perhaps, if we believe that wide income gaps lead to immigration and resentment breeds terrorism. For ultimately, the rich may have to live in gated communities while the poor roam the world outside those few enclaves. The thirdworldization of the North is another side of the coin.

There are three main reasons for the increase in global inequality. Firstly there has been a growing gulf between sluggish rural incomes in Africa and several populous Asian countries such as India and Bangladesh compared with the rich West. Secondly the shock treatment by the IMF administered to the former Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe emptied out the global “middle class”. Before the fall of the Berlin wall, most citizens in socialist countries had incomes between those in the rich west and the impoverished south. Finally, China's embrace of the market economy has opened up a divide between more affluent urban dwellers and poor farmers in the world's most populous country.

We have seen calls for increased development aid assistance and investment from rich countries for developing nations that commit themselves to market economics, good government ‘partnership’ and democracy. This is imposed by the “Masters of the world” who simply want poor nations to accept humiliating, conditioned and interfering handouts.

But the belief that a social and economic order that, has proven to be unsustainable, can be forcibly imposed is really senseless.

Why - because: The revenue in the richest nations in 1960, which was 37 times larger than that of the poorest, is now 74 times larger; the assets of the three wealthiest persons in the world amount to the gross domestic product of 48 poorest states combined; the number of people “actually starving” was 826 million in 2001.

One solution is to call on developed nations to forgive the foreign debt of all poor nations and open up hefty new lines of credit to finance their development. The ever more sophisticated weapons piling up in the arsenals of the wealthiest and the mightiest can kill the illiterate, the ill, the poor and the hungry but they cannot kill ignorance, illness, poverty or hunger. The poor countries should not be blamed for this tragedy. They neither conquered nor plundered entire continents, they did not establish colonialism or re-establish slavery, and modern

imperialism is not of their making. Therefore the main responsibility for financing their development lies with those states that, for obvious historical reasons, enjoy today the benefits of those atrocities.

In order to understand why we have reached this stalemate it is necessary to reinterpret historical and contemporary capitalism and its different paths and societal organizations and not least put the human rights issue into that context.

The new “democratic imperialism” - the Bush Family doctrine

During the late 1990s the White House in Washington had been promoting a foreign policy which relied on multilateral institutions it could control, but this all changed in the late Clinton years. The top priority turned to the sole exercise of power and unilateral actions with huge increases in military equipment and the armed forces. The peace dividend was blown into pieces long before the world had heard about 11 September terrorism. The new Bush administration's wish is not only to preserve American military superiority, but by and large it has embarked on a unilateral and neo-imperialist policy which among other characteristics means that human rights no longer plays any significant role except for American citizens.

This means in a longer term perspective that the role of the United Nations and its affiliates the World Bank, IMF and the Human Rights Commission are no longer important pillars in US policy and will definitely together with other formal Cold War institutions such as the European Union and NATO lose their importance.

This change in policy occurred during the summer of 1998 when President Bill Clinton authorized the cruise missile attacks on suspected terrorist facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan and later on when he ordered air strikes against Iraq. Clinton made it clear that he would use force in other situations wherever necessary.¹⁵

This doctrine made it easier for the new president Bush Jr. to elaborate a more coherent strategy.

Although the attacks on Pentagon in Washington and the Twin Towers in Manhattan, New York, September 11 2001 have been proclaimed as the starting point of an entire U-turn in foreign policy, the new unilateral device of the Bush Jr. Administration's belief is a confirmation of the Clinton doctrine. The real new strategy is that it dubs China and the US as destined to become political and military rivals in the 21st century.

¹⁵Michael T. Klare, US Aims to Win on All Fronts, Le Monde Diplomatique, May, 1999.

US neo-conservative strategists are also responding to what they view as a more threatening international environment. Although in the early 1990s they forecast that the level of global disorder would decline and interstate disputes be settled through international negotiations, they grew steadily less optimistic as the decade wore on. George Tenet, director of the CIA, expressed this concern on 2 February 1999 in his testimony on the global security environment: “In this last annual threat assessment of the 20th century, I must tell you that US citizens and interests are threatened in many arenas and across a wide spectrum of issues. These threats arise both from traditional dangers, such as regional conflicts and terrorism, and from new dangers, notably the increasing availability of sophisticated technology and the ease and speed with which it can be applied by those hostile to the United States.”¹⁶ This perception creates alarm about the actions of other powers, to a lesser degree Russia, but especially China which inclines America to rely more on its military strength than on international institutions to protect its overseas interests. Hence the increase in the military budget, development of a national missile defense system, denial of technology to China. The result has been a withdrawal from the UN, withdrawn from and international binding treaties and extremist unilateral foreign policy towards what some commentators refer to as empire-building.

To anyone who has followed strategic thinking in Washington over the past few decades, this is an extraordinary new development. It seems to imply that the US must be prepared to employ military force in any situation when the White House decides that larger issues are at stake. The US seems to have embarked on a new path in its international behavior. The global political environment is likely to alter in dramatic and unpredictable ways especially in connection with the US response to the perceived threat from international terrorism.¹⁷

The Iraq/Israel Connection

After months of threats and a long military buildup, the United States attacked Iraq March 20, 2003. Washington cut short UN arms inspections, acting with its military ally, Britain, after a war-sanctioning resolution had failed by a wide margin to gain support in the UN Security Council. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated that a war without Council endorsement would “not be in conformity with the UN Charter.” It means that the war is illegal and an act of aggression. Popular Iraqi resistance shows that most Iraqis do not see the US attack as “liberation”. The war faced strong opposition from France, Germany, Russia, China and the great majority of UN member states as well as millions of citizens around the world. The occupation has created a humanitarian crisis in Iraq and a deep political crisis in the international system as well as an Iraq

¹⁶Quoted from *ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid*

resistance movement resembling Vietcong in during the US intervention in Vietnam.

At the same time as an enormous, deliberately intimidating force is being built up by America overseas, while inside the country, economic and social bad news multiplies relentlessly. The huge capitalist machine seems to be faltering, even as it grinds down the vast majority of citizens. Nonetheless, George Bush Jr. has invented another large tax cut for the one per cent of the population that is comparatively rich. The public education system is in a major crisis, and health insurance for 50 million Americans simply does not exist. Israel asks for 15 billion dollars in additional loan guarantees and military aid. And the unemployment rates in the US mount inexorably, as more jobs are lost every day.¹⁸ The results on the domestic front seem to mirror the results in the international arena.

The global unilateral US onslaught has been a complete failure - at least as far as dealing with non-state terrorism is concerned. Tom Daschle, the Democrats' leader in the Senate, is even more brutal. Summing up a litany of unmet objectives in the US confrontation with militant Islamism, he asks: "By what measure can we say this has been successful?" But most disruptive to the White House has been the authentication of the taped messages from Bin Laden, promising bloody revenge for the deaths of the innocents in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. This was the man whose capture or killing was the first objective of Bush's war on terrorism. The irony is that together with the proclaimed leader of the Taliban, the one-eyed Mullah Omar and Osama Bin Laden, the masterminds of America's humiliation remain free.¹⁹

All this has been the inevitable product of the central choice made shortly after September 11, which was to opt for a mainly military solution to the challenge of Islamist terrorism. That was a recipe for failure. By their nature, terrorist or guerrilla campaigns which have deep social roots and draw on a widespread sense of injustice - as militant Islamist groups do, regardless of the obscurantism of their ideology - cannot be defeated militarily. And as the war on terror has increasingly become a war to enforce US global power, it has only intensified the appeal of "asymmetric warfare" to the powerless.²⁰

There is little sign of any weakening of the willful western refusal to address seriously the causes of Islamist terrorism. Thus, during the past year, the US has armed and bolstered Pakistan and the central Asian dictatorships, supported

¹⁸Edward Said, An unacceptable helplessness, 6-22 January 2003 Issue No. 621 Al Ahram Weekly.

¹⁹Seumas Milne, A war that can't be won, The Guardian Thursday November 21, 2002

²⁰Ibid.

Putin's ongoing devastation of Chechnya, invaded Iraq at huge human cost, established new US bases across the Muslim world and, most recklessly of all, provided every necessary cover for Ariel Sharon's bloody rampages through the occupied Palestinian territories.²¹ Finally the fact that "the US has been undermining the United Nations, the violations of international law, the breaching of the UN Charter, all inherent in this unilateral US war."²² This shows a superpower willing to break international law and dismiss human rights if necessary.

Edward Said's comment illuminates the problem: "Were Iraq the world's largest exporter of apples or oranges, no one would care about its weapons of mass destruction or human rights exploitation. Saddam's regime has violated many human rights, there's no arguing. But everything [Colin] Powell has accused the Ba'athists of has been the stock in trade of the Israeli government since 1948."²³

Said mentions the human rights violations that he says Israel has committed against the Palestinians, including torture, assassination, assault against civilians, annexation of territory, mass killing, denial of the right to free passage, denial of medical aid, use of citizens as human shields, expropriation of water, and economic pauperization. "Short of genocide, I cannot think of a single human right that has not been violated in Gaza. And it has all been carried on with the total support of the U.S. government". The amount of aid, upwards of \$135 billion that the United States has given to Israel is primarily spent on tanks, F-16s, helicopters, and weaponry with which to subdue and terrorize Palestinians. In addition to supporting Israel, the United States has also mistreated American citizens of Palestinian origin, he alleged, through racial profiling and detention. Finally, Said singles out Lebanon, where more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees live, as the guiltiest of depriving them of basic human rights.²⁴

Perspectives

As Bello notes alongside and intersecting the crisis of overproduction is a massive crisis of reproduction. There are three processes that are severely complicating the ability of the system to reproduce itself stably: the crisis of ideological legitimacy, the crisis of liberal democracy and the crisis of overextension.

²¹Ibid

²²Phyllis Bennis, Déjà vu all over again, Znet, October 15, 2002

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cmf?SectionID=40&ItemID=2481>.

²³Edward Said, 2003-02-19

http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/02/20_said.shtml.

²⁴Ibid.

The crisis of ideological legitimacy refers to the increasing inability of the neoliberal ideology underpinning today's global capitalism to persuade people of its necessity and viability as a system of production, exchange and distribution. The disaster wrought by structural adjustment in Africa and Latin America; the chain reaction of financial crises in Mexico, Southeast Asia, Brazil and Russia; the descent into chaos of free-market Argentina; and the combination of massive fraud and the spectacular wipe-out of \$7 trillion of investors' wealth - a sum that nearly equals the U.S.'s annual GDP - have all eaten away at capitalism's credibility.

Running alongside and intersecting with these two crises is the crisis of liberal democracy, which is the typical mode of governance of capitalist economic regimes. In both the North and South liberal democracy has served as the political cocoon for the stable reproduction of capitalism, so the importance of its legitimacy and stability cannot be understated.²⁵

In places like the Philippines and Pakistan, popular disillusionment with elite democracies fuelled by money politics is rife among the lower classes, and even the middle class, being in the case of Pakistan one of the factors that allowed General Musharraf to seize political power. Clearly, from Africa to Latin America, the phenomenon of the spread of Washington- or Westminster-type formal democracies, which American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington called the "third wave of democratization," is over.²⁶ Indeed human rights both in political and social terms are entering a bleak future.

Also in India, the present government's policies, which, apart from the perpetration of state terrorism in the Valley of Kashmir (in the name of fighting terrorism), have also turned a blind eye to the recent state-supervised pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat. In India there are some pretty reprehensible social practices, against untouchables', against Christians and Muslims, against women. Pakistan and Bangladesh have even worse ways of dealing with minority communities and women.²⁷

Meanwhile, the soul-and-body destroying situation in Palestine worsens all the time. There seems no force capable of stopping Sharon and Mofaz, who bellow their defiance to the whole world. We forbid, we punish, we ban, we break, and

²⁵Walden Bello, The Multiple Crises of Global Capitalism, Canadian Dimension January/February 2003.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Arundhati Roy, Come September, The Friday Times, Pakistan, September 27 - October 3, 2002

we destroy. The torrent of unbroken violence against an entire people continues.²⁸

Since 11 September, America has established bases at the gateways to all the major sources of fossil fuels, especially central Asia. The Unocal oil company is to build a pipeline across Afghanistan. Bush Jr. has scrapped the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions, the war crimes provisions of the International Criminal Court and the anti-ballistic missile treaty. He has said he will use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states “if necessary”. Under cover of propaganda about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, the Bush regime is developing new weapons of mass destruction that undermine international treaties on biological and chemical warfare.²⁹

Summing up the universality of human rights is facing the strongest challenge yet. Double standards and selectivity are becoming the norm. Security cannot and must not take precedence over human rights. The biggest danger to human rights is when political and economic interests are allowed to drive the human-rights agenda. However, as Amnesty International has noted several times during the past decade or so, the biggest problem is that the world's only superpower the United States deploys a hypocritical stance at not recognizing the extent to which human rights abuses are going unchecked in its own territory. The US government has a selective approach to human rights -- using international human rights standards as a yardstick by which to judge other countries, but consistently failing to apply those same standards at home. Furthermore, US government policies often lead to human rights being sacrificed for political, economic and military interests, both in the US and abroad, by providing weapons, security equipment and training to other countries, the USA is responsible for the same abuses it denounces in its State Department reports.

²⁸Edward Said, An unacceptable helplessness, 6-22 January 2003 Issue No. 621 Al Ahram Weekly.

²⁹John Pilger, New Statesman London, 12 December 2002

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